

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001892

SIPDIS

STATE FOR ECA DINA POWELL, NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [BA](#) [OESC](#) [BILAT](#)

SUBJECT: BAHRAIN: REINVIGORATING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY THROUGH CULTURAL AND SPORTS PROGRAMS

Ref: SECSTATE 222516

1. Summary: Cultural and sports programs have great potential to support mission goals, but the dearth of such programs and the resources available to pursue them has resulted in many missed opportunities. On numerous occasions, we face a hostile public audience to U.S. foreign policy. From a cultural standpoint however, there is a deep appreciation for American society and culture. Cultural programming allows us to reach much broader audiences, from artists and intellectuals to university and high school age students, and show them the United States in all its dimensions, its diversity and openness, its creativity and innovation. Sports programs, although used only recently in Bahrain, have enormous potential for increasing our access and interaction with youth audiences. A larger investment in cultural and sports programs will give more depth to our efforts to engage and have greater resonance across a broad range of audiences.

2. An Arab-nationalist editor-in-chief switches gears from a diatribe on U.S.-sponsored coups, to describe the founders of the American republic as "intellectual and revolutionary forbearers" of Arab-nationalism. An often anti-American columnist is writing a book on the similarities between American and Arab folk music, and is fascinated by Elvis Presley and the 1950s Beat Generation. A cleric is profoundly affected by the freedom, openness, and diversity in American society he witnesses during an International Visitor program on "Interfaith Dialogue" and opens an interfaith dialogue in Bahrain.

3. At almost every turn, one discovers an eagerness to explore the "real America" within, even when there is criticism of America as a "culturally hegemonic superpower." We are missing valuable opportunities to advance mission priorities in the field of cultural and sports programs. From visual arts to Formula-One racing, these programs can form the bridge across a gaping divide between the America and the Middle East of the 21st century. The following are responses to questions posed in paragraph four of reftel:

A. Cultural programs can cut across a number of mission goals. Key to this success is facilitating people-to-people connections in non-political environments.

- A recent visit by American Muslim Imam Yahya Hendi is an excellent example of how a program can have a multiplier effect and touch on a number of policy priorities, such as democracy, counter terrorism, and mutual understanding. Hendi engaged with youth, intellectuals, press, religious, and political leaders. Engaging an audience that is often difficult and sensitive for Americans to reach, religious scholars, Hendi brought together Shia and Sunni clerics in prayer and dialogue. In commentary, public appearances, and various interaction captured by the press, "Imam Yahya" sent a message on the importance of interfaith dialogue, solidarity against extremism, and the state of Islam in America. The messages reverberated through commentary and in the words of those he encountered, generating immense public interest and in the process advanced mission goals of amplifying voices of tolerance, isolating extremism, and engaging Muslim youth. Although this is not a cultural program in a strict sense, U.S. Speakers remain a powerful tool to engage foreign cultures.

- An earlier Citizen Ambassador visit by two top American Educators illustrates how such programs can broaden exposure to American ideals among target youth audiences. With messages of youth and women's empowerment, the Citizen Ambassadors were allowed nearly unfettered access to public schools to meet with student leaders, high achievers, and ordinary kids in groups large and small. This unprecedented American presence in Bahrain's public schools helped forge new relationships for the Embassy with school administrators and classroom teachers resulting in multiple spin-off programs and continued Embassy involvement in schools.

- Sports programs can offer an opportunity for the media to refocus attention on to positive images of American celebrities and heroes. Last year, post hosted a successful Cultural Envoy program when Georgetown Basketball Players Omari Faulkner and Courtland Freeman visited post. As in

the U.S., basketball and soccer are enjoyed by huge numbers of non-elite youth in Bahrain, bringing resonance to Faulkner and Freeman's messages of American values in teamwork, diversity, and perseverance.

- Similarly, exchange programs that highlight cultural connections have significant short and long-term impact, as described above in the Summer 2005 IV program on interfaith dialogue.

**B.** For maximum impact, cultural and sports programs must be crafted to be as visually engaging as possible and incorporate American-Bahraini interaction. These two elements ensure high interest with our audiences and encourage robust media coverage. For this reason, performances are better than paper shows, visits by visual artist and sports envoys are preferable to films about them alone. Some examples:

- More programs on basketball and soccer will give us deeper access to youth audiences we might not otherwise reach. Bahrain is home to a Disabled Sports Society with an extremely active wheelchair basketball program. A visit by prominent disabled American athletes would be a chance to show American diversity, ingenuity and appreciation for people with disabilities, and build a lasting relationship with local civil society.

- A visit or series of visits by an American theater director or film producer could foster Bahraini independent media in creative ways. The theater and independent film communities produce some of the most interesting and sharp social criticism in Bahrain. However, both are hamstrung in their reach for mass appeal because of their lack of technical proficiency. Such a visit, culminating in a public performance or viewing, could simultaneously help to build the production capacity of these groups while drawing public attention to their work.

- A visual artist could hold an exhibit and conduct master classes. NOTE: Post has requested an American Cultural Specialist in Calligraphy to answer substantial interest in that art form. There are significant artistic societies in Manama we have limited access to.

- A folk musician could engage with traditional Arab folk artists and with students in masters classes; an American band director could rehearse American band classics with the Bahrain Defense Force and Public Security Bands and conduct them in a festival concert; Native American musicians could perform at an opening of a paper show exhibit on Native American Voices. Similarly, a Native American or African American cultural figure could give life to the story of Native American or Black History month.

**C.** Thankfully, there is a wide degree of operational latitude for post to levy cultural programs in the kind of people-to-people diplomacy that can win hearts and minds. Budget limitations are the single largest barrier to marshalling cultural programs in useful ways since the highest impact programs often require substantial money for travel and accommodations.

Another constraint is program flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of public diplomacy in culturally, socially, economically, and politically disparate contexts. For example, it could be valuable to draw upon input from PAOs in the field and in ECA for regional events like "American Music Abroad", so we are selecting the right artists for the most culturally appropriate audiences. Sometimes we end up trying to put a square peg in a round hole.

**4.** COMMENT: In short, post welcomes the effort by ECA to reinvigorate public diplomacy through cultural and sports programs. We believe there is tremendous potential in this area to "change the subject" when it comes to engaging an often skeptical foreign policy audience, one that remains appreciative and open to understanding the American experience. We look forward to hearing more about the future of this vital area of public diplomacy.

MONROE